op 3

As managers of the automated data processing operations of the component

agencies, you play a vital role in the management of the Agriculture

Department's 274 programs.

If the energy brownout hits our computers, the importance of our

computer center will be realized by every employee of the department, if only by

their failure to receive their paychecks.

I am not here to discuss the technological advances of your ever-

changing field. However, as an intricate part of the administrative offices of

the department, your planning must dovetail with the initiatives and objectives

that Secretary Bergland has set for the department.

Secretary Bergland is committed to moulding an agency that will serve

the nation's food and fiber system. Towards that end, he and his deputy, Jim

Williams, are determined that the 17 agencies that make up the department blend

into a cooperative effort that will serve every segment of our vast agricultural

system from the soil to the dining room table.

Towards that end, Secretary Bergland has launched what he has termed a

national dialogue on the future of American agriculture.

This intention was announced last March when he spoke to the National Farmers Union in Kansas City. He said:

"We know...(Agriculture Department policies and programs)...helped create a food and fiber system that is the envy of the world. We know this system has fed us and the world at reasonable costs. We know this system has yielded a fair return to those who produced the harvest bounty."

Secretary Bergland continued:

"But even with these successes, we must ask ourselves this: could it be that the emphasis on price and income support programs has worked to the disadvantage of the small and medium sized farmer?

"The time has come to consider where we are, where we seem to be going, and to ask ourselves some critically important questions...

"Are those policies and programs at the same time creating, or helping to create, something we don't want in American agriculture?"

And Secretary Bergland said: "The truth is we really don't have a workable policy on the structure of agriculture."

Secretary Bergland has expressed concern that of the three million farms in the United States today, the 200,000 largest farms produce two-thirds of all agricultural production. In contrast, as recently as 1960, small farms with sales less than $20,000 a year produced nearly half the value of farm products. Today farms of that size produce less than 11 percent of our farm output.

With the decline of the small farms, we have seen the deterioration of rural communities. Gone are the local fertilizer dealer, the machinery dealer, the livestock auction barn and small merchants.

As a person who has been involved in the economic problems of urban centers, I can understand the distortion that has taken place in the traditional social order of rural America.

It is planned that the national dialogue will include 10 one-day information gathering sessions around the country in November and December. Results of the sessions will be published in the Federal Register and made available through agency offices to the public.

A series of issue definition papers are being prepared to serve as the e beginning for the dialogue.

A broad research agenda is being developed to support legislative initiatives, tax code modification and administrative actions.

There are two major reasons for the interest in the structure of American agriculture.

The first is economic.

How does the farming sector perform in the provision of raw food products for the nation's consumers? Are our national resources being used in the most efficient manner? What has been the effect of the consolidation of farms into larger units? Have the social and economic costs of such concentration outweighed the benefits in terms of increased productivity?

The second reason for considering structural issues relates to the objectives, ideals, values, and goals, both of society as a whole and of those who are most directly affected--farm operators, tenants, laborers, marketers and consumers. This is the area in which questions of culture, tradition, population, income distribution and rural ways of life are raised.

I believe that it is fairly obvious that the data processing capabilities within the department can be of invaluable assistance in this national dialogue.

What I have been suggesting is an example of the post-industrial society shift in emphasis from a manufacturing to a service economy.

The post-industrial society has been described by Daniel Bell, a Harvard University sociologist, as having the changing characteristics of a social and economic landscape such as our own.

The impetus to the managerial revolution stems from the rapidly developing state-of-the-art of information technologies generally, and automatic and electronic data processing capabilities in particular.

Automated data processing has become the "buzz" word in the corporate sector. Today, as everyone in this audience knows, data processing and telecommunications are playing an increasingly important role in government.

The deluge of developments in computer hardware and software have contributed to the euphoria that sometimes accompanies a new technology. Proponents believe that ADP ensures more effective management (MEM). Hence, ADP equals MEM. Granted, there is some merit to this viewpoint; but we should not fail to recognize that a simplistic logic like this will not carry us very far.

Automated data processing, like other technological inventions before it, is primarily a tool for more effective decision-making. Unless ADP is related to the ultimate goals of service delivery, we will tend to have a misplaced emphasis upon the tool itself, rather than the use of that tool for better ends.

It is important in a conference such as this to relate ADP to management so that there is continuing dialogue between the needs of technical specialists, on the one hand, and the interests of managers, on the other. I note with pleasure that this conference has been designed to convey to the department's senior ADP managers information on technological changes and management techniques that will assist them in improving their internal data processing efforts.

At the present time, the federal government is significantly expanding its use of computers and telecommunications in order to take advantage of both the economic benefits and the improvements in government which can be realized. As you know, the Office of Operations and Finance's data services aid departmental agencies in a variety of ways:

o They manage the department's computer centers.

o They provide consultation and assistance in development and improvement of automatic systems; long range ADP plans; agency standards programs; solving problems related to voice and data communication services; automated data base and information delivery systems; agency security programs and risk analysis; studying requirements for acquiring word processing equipment or services; compliance with the Privacy Act; responding to Freedom of Information Act inquiries; report management and special task force studies.

o They provide guidance for responding to government requirements and policies.

o They maintain an ADP library.

o They sponsor department ADP management conferences.

These services are vital to our overall functions in the department. As technology in the ADP field continues to develop, the Office of Operations and Finance data services will continue to provide insight to the agencies from a departmental perspective, and to provide every assistance available to agencies with the objective of a modern, effective, and efficient telecommunications and ADP network for all.

I am deeply appreciative of the initiatives provided by the Office of Operations and Finance data services. While these end results are sufficiently important by themselves, I must emphasize that these services must be seen within the broader context of the total responsibilities of the Office of Administration. To the extent that we are able to link the work of data services with every single aspect of our total mission and function, we will be successful in demonstrating the value of ADP and telecommunications technology. For example, how can we more effectively interface data services with the budget process?

Next month I will be involved in a series of budget hearings, as a prelude to our final budget determination for fiscal year 1981. The Office of Management and Budget has suggested a closer integration of information technology planning and budgeting—principally by defining the mechanics for justifying information technology resources under the new zero based budget and multi-year budget process. This is obviously an area of potential use and innovation for us.

Last January OMB published a brief description of examples of effective applications of information technology by federal agencies. These examples were published in order to recognize the people and the agencies responsible for these applications and to set an example for others to follow.

The examples are impressive. They demonstrate improvements in service or management, the reduced or eliminated need for hiring hundreds of additional employees to do the work manually, and the reduced or eliminated need for spending hundreds of millions of additional dollars.

To cite a specific example, I might use the one that is close to home. The Soil Conservation Service has established a system to predict spring and summer water runoff in states west of the Mississippi River to help farmers decide which crops to plant and when to plant them.

The system will be operated at an annual cost of $1.6 million and is expected to save farmers from $4.4 to $4.6 million annually.

The foregoing example is illustrative of the use of technology in strengthening service delivery and in providing direct benefits to service users or consumers. If the system works, we might truly say that ADP equals MEM.

I am happy to see that we are in the forefront of ADP and telecommunications technology. However, rapid changes in the state-of-the-art will mean a constant reevaluation of our existing procedures and practices, as well as creative adaptations to the changes in the environment. We must work together in fostering an organizational climate that is conducive to creativity in the development of this technology and in its use in the services that we provide to our citizens.

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